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PATENT APPLICATION  
USSN 09/074,496

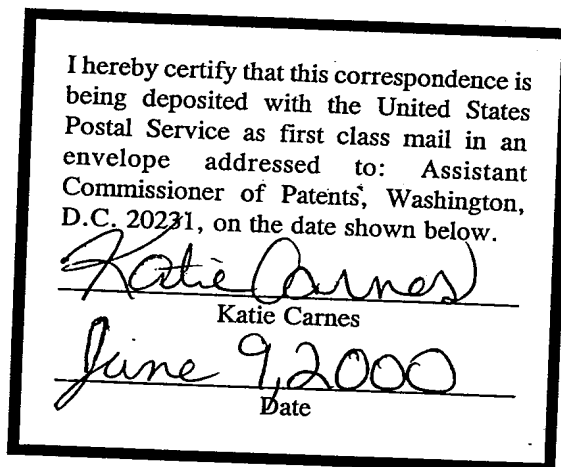
**EXHIBIT A**

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of: James R. Albritton  
Serial No.: 09/074,496  
Filing Date: May 7, 1998  
Group Art Unit: 3629  
Examiner: Buck, B.  
Title: BREAKAWAY SUPPORT POST FOR HIGHWAY  
GUARDRAIL END TREATMENTS

Honorable Assistant Commissioner of  
Patents  
Washington, D.C. 20231

Dear Sir:



**AMENDMENT AND REQUEST FOR DECLARATION OF  
INTERFERENCE PURSUANT TO 37 C.F.R. 1.607**

Applicant respectfully requests that the above-identified patent application be amended as set forth herein and that an interference be declared between the above-identified application and United States Patent 5,988,598 to Sicking et al., issued on November 23, 1999 ("the '598 patent").

Applicant requests that the **Amendment and Response to the Office Action mailed February 17, 2000** submitted to the U.S. Patent Office on May 19, 2000 be entered prior to entering this Amendment.

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please add the following new Claims 37 and 38:

--37. (New) A breakaway guardrail post for highway crash control systems comprising:

an upper post member having a weak impact axis and a strong impact axis;

a lower post member disposed beneath and spaced apart from said upper post member;

a connecting joint member having a first end and a second end, said first end of said joint connected at said first end by a first fastener to said upper post member and connected at said second end by a second fastener to said lower post member, said first fastener having a first failure strength less than a second failure strength of said second fastener. --

--38. (New) The post of Claim 37 wherein said first fastener further comprises: a first connector having a first failure strength, and a second connector having a second failure strength, said first failure strength greater than said second failure strength such that upon an impact force being applied along said weak impact axis, said second connector fails and said upper post rotates about said first connector. --

I. **Claims Copied from the '598 Patent**

Claims 37 and 38, added by the present amendment, have been identically copied from Claims 1 and 2 of the '598 patent, respectively. Claims 1 and 2 of the '598 patent currently enjoy the presumption of validity over the applicable prior art. As the present application is entitled to an effective filing date preceding that of the application which matured into the '598 patent, Claims 37 and 38 of the present application are also patentable over the prior art.

II. **Proposed Count**

Applicant submits the following Proposed Count in interference, which corresponds exactly to Claim 1 of the '598 patent and corresponds exactly to Claim 37 of the present application.

**PROPOSED COUNT:** A breakaway guardrail post for highway crash control systems comprising:

an upper post member having a weak impact axis and a strong impact axis;  
a lower post member disposed beneath and spaced apart from said upper post member;

a connecting joint member having a first end and a second end, said first end of said joint connected at said first end by a first fastener to said upper post member and connected at said second end by a second fastener to said lower post member, said first fastener having a first failure strength less than a second failure strength of said second fastener.

III. All Claims of the '598 Patent Correspond to the Proposed Count

Claim 1 of the '598 patent corresponds exactly to the Proposed Count. Claims 2-6 of the '598 patent substantially correspond to the Proposed Count. The proposed count is for a breakaway guardrail post having an upper portion and a lower portion which are joined by a connecting joint member having a first fastener with a first failure strength and a second fastener having a second failure strength. The upper portion is further defined as having a weak impact axis and a strong impact axis.

Claim 2 of the '598 patent further defines the first fastener of the connecting joint member as having a first connector with a first failure strength and a second connector with a second failure strength such that upon an impact force applied along the weak impact axis, the second connector fails and the upper portion rotates about the first connector. As exemplified by Fig. 11 of U.S. Patent No. 4,236,843 to Chisholm, it is known in the art of breakaway posts that upon failure of a first connecting member a portion of the post can rotate about another connecting member. In view of the teachings of the '843 patent, Claim 2 is an obvious alteration over the Proposed Count. Thus, Claim 2 substantially corresponds to the Proposed Count.

Claim 3 of the '598 patent further defines the upper post as having a tear out section adjacent the first fastener and arranged such that a first section of the first fastener pulls through the tear out section upon an impact force along the weak axis. It is an obvious design choice to form a fastener joint having a reduced failure strength by creating a weakness in the article adjacent the fastener. The strength of any fastener joint is necessarily a function of the strength of the connector member itself and the strength of the structures into which the connector is received. The tear-out section of Claim 3 represents an obvious alternative arrangement wherein the strength of the receiving member is weakened to enable the receiving member of the fastener joint to fail upon

impact. Thus, Claim 3 is not patentably distinct from the Proposed Count and should be designated as substantially corresponding to the Proposed Count.

Claim 4 of the '598 patent further defines the connecting joint as having a U-shaped channel with legs overlaying opposite sides of the upper post. As illustrated in Figure 5 of U.S. Patent No. 5,664,905 ("the '905 patent"), the use of U-shaped guide with legs overlying opposite sides of the post as part of a connecting joint between upper and lower portions of a collapsible support post is known in the art. In view of the teachings of the '905 patent, Claim 4 is not separately patentable over the Proposed Count and should be designated as substantially corresponding thereto.

Claim 5 depends from Claim 1 and merely recites that the first fastener comprises a weld seam. As noted in the Office Action in the '598 patent dated February 19, 1999 (Paper No. 2), this is an obvious design choice which does not render this Claim patentably distinct from the Proposed Count. The equivalence of the weld seam to other fasteners, such as bolts, is evident from the specification of the '598 patent wherein weld seams are indicated to be equivalent to bolts. In particular at Column 2, line 32-34 of the '598 patent, it is stated that "[t]he lower post member 14 is rigidly attached to the plates 25 by four or more bolts 24A (*or welding*). . ." (Emphasis added).

Claim 6 depends from Claim 5 and further defines the connecting joint as having a plug weld for the reduced failure strength fastener. As set forth in the specification of the '598 patent, for a welded connection, "the breakaway force threshold is controlled by the length, size and shape of the weld." Col. 4, lines 7-9. The strength characteristics of such welds, as set forth in the specification, are well known characteristics. One skilled in the art seeking a fastener with a failure strength less than that of the weld seam of Claim 5, would consider the use of a plug weld to be an obvious choice. Thus, Claim 6 is not patentably distinct from the Proposed Count and should be designated as substantially corresponding thereto.

IV. Claims 5, 9, 28, 36 and new claims 37 and 38 of the Present Application  
Correspond to the Proposed Count

Claim 5 defines a breakaway support post which includes, *inter alia*, an elongated body having an upper portion and a lower portion, a rotatable coupling assembly disposed between the upper and lower portions, and means for releasably securing the upper portion of the post generally aligned with the lower portion of the post. The rotatable coupling assembly and means for releasably securing the upper portion in alignment with the lower portion, when read in view of the specification, can read on the first and second fasteners having first and second failure strengths, as set forth in the proposed count. Thus, Claim 5 of the present application corresponds substantially to the proposed Count.

Claim 9 of the present application corresponds substantially to the Proposed Count. Claim 9 defines a breakaway support post which includes *inter alia* an upper portion, a lower portion and means for coupling the upper and lower portion. Numerous embodiments of the Claimed coupling means are disclosed in the specification. For example, referring to Figs. 4-6, an exemplary coupling means includes a lower bracket 152 attached to a lower post portion and coupled to an upper bracket 150 by a pivot pin 154. Such elements generally correspond to the first and second fasteners set forth in the proposed count. Rotation of the upper and lower portions is prevented until a sufficient impact force along a weak axis of the post occurs. Thus, these elements also meet the proposed count's elements that the first fastener have a first failure strength less than a second failure strength of the second faster. While this particular embodiment is a patentably distinct species of the proposed count (see Restriction Requirement mailed on September 24, 1999, Paper No. 6, Group II), it serves to illustrate that Claim 9 can fall

within the scope of the proposed count and should be designated as substantially corresponding thereto.

Claim 28 corresponds substantially to the proposed count. Claim 28 is directed to a support post for mounting a guardrail which includes a first and second portion coupled to one another by a frangible connection including a rotatable coupling. The frangible connection is oriented relative to the guardrail to buckle under an impact force applied to an end of the guardrail and to resist a rail face impact with the guardrail. As noted in connection with Claim 2 of the '598 patent, it was known to have a support post rotate about some connecting structure upon failure. Thus, Claim 28 is not patentably distinct from the proposed count and should be designated as corresponding substantially thereto.

Claim 36 corresponds substantially to the proposed count. Claim 36 is directed to a roadway guardrail system having at least one support post. The support post is defined as having an upper portion and a lower portion which are coupled by a rotatable coupling having an axis of rotation which, *inter alia*, defines a direction of high mechanical strength perpendicular thereto. The rotatable coupling is further defined as having a frangible connection for maintaining the alignment between the upper and lower portions of the support post. As noted in connection with Claim 2 of the '598 patent, it was known to have a support post rotate about some connecting structure upon failure. Thus, Claim 36 is not patentably distinct from the proposed count and should be designated as corresponding substantially thereto.

Claims 37 and 38 are identical to Claims 1 and 2 of the '598 patent and correspond to the Proposed Count exactly and substantially, respectively, for the reasons set forth above with respect to the '598 patent.

V. Claims 1-4, 6-8, 10-27, 29 and 31-33 of the present Application as



**amended do not Correspond to the Proposed Count.**

The breakaway support posts of Claims 1-4, 23 and 29, which include, *inter alia*, an elongate body and a plurality of slots formed in the elongate body, are patentably distinct from the proposed count. Claims 1-4, 23 and 29 of the present application do not recite a guardrail with an upper section and a lower section spaced apart from the upper section. Nor do these Claims recite a connecting joint member as set forth in the Proposed Count. Such Claims generally correspond to Group I identified by the Examiner in an earlier restriction requirement (Paper No. 6, mailed September 24, 1999) as a patentably distinct species of the present invention. Thus, Claims 1-4, 23 and 29 do not correspond to the Proposed Count.

Claims 6-8 further define the breakaway support post of Claim 5, which includes, *inter alia*, a rotatable coupling assembly and means for releasably securing the upper portion of the post generally aligned with the lower portion of the post. Claim 6 further defines the coupling means as having first and second U-shaped brackets coupled to one another by a pivot pin extending laterally through the brackets. Similarly, Claim 7 further defines Claim 5 by reciting respective brackets attached to adjacent ends of the upper portion and lower portion of the elongated body. Such coupling embodiments are not taught or suggested by the prior art and are not rendered obvious in view of the Proposed Count.

Claim 8 further defines Claim 5 by the inclusion of a block interposed between the guardrail and the upper portion of the elongated body to create lateral offset between the guardrail and the breakaway support post. As this is a patentably distinct invention, Claim 8 does not correspond to the Proposed Count.

Claims 10-12 depend from Claim 9 and further define the “means for coupling. . .” of Claim 9. Claim 10 defines the means for coupling as comprising breaker bars. Claim 11 further defines the breaker bars as having chamfered surfaces and Claim

12 defines the breaker bars as having protruding members to facilitate rotation. Nothing in the prior art suggests modifying the invention defined by the proposed count by the inclusion of breaker bars. Claims 10-12 generally correspond to Group IV in the previous Restriction Requirement, and therefore, have been identified by the Examiner as a patentably distinct species of the present invention and, therefore, do not correspond to the Proposed Count.

Claims 13-21 are directed to a roadway guardrail system which includes an upper portion and a lower portion having first and second members, respectively, which are coupled by at least two rods laying along an imaginary line that extends along a strong axis of the guardrail. At least one spacer is provided between the first and second members. The arrangement of rods and the inclusion of at least one spacer are not rendered obvious by the proposed count or the prior art. The guardrail configuration of Claim 13 is patentably distinct from the Proposed Count and therefore Claims 13-21 should be designated as not corresponding to the Proposed Count.

Claim 22 is directed to a roadway guardrail system which includes an upper portion and a lower portion having first and second members, respectively. The first and second members are coupled by a pin located on the guardrail side of the post and along an imaginary line that extends along a strong axis of the guardrail. At least one spacer is provided between the upper and lower portions. The arrangement of the pin and the inclusion of at least one spacer are not rendered obvious by the proposed count or the prior art. The guardrail configuration of Claim 22 is patentably distinct from the Proposed Count.

Claims 24-26 define a guardrail which includes an upper portion pivotally connected to a lower portion by a hinge having a hinge pin. The hinge is releasably restrained from pivoting by a shear pin which is smaller in diameter than the hinge pin.

Unlike Claim 2 of the '598 patent, Claim 24 defines a structure which is not rendered obvious over the Proposed Count by the prior art, including U.S. Patent No. 4,236,843 to Chisholm. The configuration defined by Claim 24 is patentably distinct from the Proposed Count and therefore, Claims 24-26 do not correspond to the Proposed Count.

Claim 27 depends from Claim 24 and further defines the hinge as having a bracket with a slot for receiving a pivot pin, thus allowing the upper portion and lower portions to be removably engaged. Claim 27 generally corresponds to Group VI in the previous restriction requirement. This is clearly a patentable distinction over both Claim 24 and the Proposed Count.

Claim 31 depends from Claim 28 and further defines the frangible connection as comprising a releasable hinge. The use of a releasable hinge is not obvious in view of the Proposed Count and therefore represents patentable subject matter over the Proposed Count. Thus, Claim 31 should be designated as not corresponding to the Proposed Count.

Claim 32 is directed to a support post having first and second members having first and second ends. A first pair of U-shaped bracket extends from one of the ends with a gap there between. The other end includes a second bracket which is received within the first U-shaped bracket. The first and second brackets are rotatably coupled via a pin. The first and second members are maintained in a lengthened position by a shearable body extending between the second flange and at least one of the first flanges. This arrangement of flanges coupled by a pin and a shearable member defined in Claims 32 and 34 is patentably distinct from the Proposed Count.

Claim 33 is directed to a support post which includes first and second I-beam portions which are pivotally coupled via a hinge and are maintained in a lengthened position by a shearable body extending between extensions of the I-beam sections. This

support post configuration is patentably distinct from the Proposed Count and, therefore, Claim 33 should be designated as not corresponding thereto.

VI. **Application of New Claims 37 and 38 to the Present Application**

As set forth below, the elements of Claims 37 and 38 are applied to the disclosure of this application as follows:

<b>Claim 37, corresponding to Claim 1 of U.S. Patent 5,988,598</b>	<b>Support in Application Serial No. 09/074,496</b>
A breakaway guardrail post for highway crash control systems comprising:	See e.g., support post 130. Figs. 4-6
an upper post member having a weak impact axis and a strong impact axis;	Support post 130 includes upper portion 142. Figs. 4-6, specification page 19, line 24-27.  Support post 130 has a weak direction and a strong direction. Specification page 13, lines 12-13.
a lower post member disposed beneath and spaced apart from said upper post member;	Support post 130 includes lower portion 144, beneath and spaced from upper portion 142. Figs. 4-6.

<p>a connecting joint member having a first end and a second end,</p> <p>said first end of said joint connected at said first end by a first fastener to said upper post member</p> <p>and connected at said second end by a second fastener to said lower post member,</p> <p>said first fastener having a first failure strength less than a second failure strength of said second fastener.</p>	<p>Bracket 152 is a joint member that has a first end (upper) and a second end (lower). Figs. 4-6.</p> <p>The first (upper) end of bracket 152 is connected to upper post member by a first fastener including pivot pin 154, shear pin 156 and bracket 150. Figs. 4-6, specification page 20, lines 3-21.</p> <p>The second (lower) end of bracket 152 is connected by a second fastener (attached) to lower post portion 144. Figs. 4-6, specification page 20, lines 3-8.</p> <p>The first fastener (shear pin 156) has a failure strength less than the second fastener. Specification page 21, lines 5-14.</p>
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<p><b>Claim 38, corresponding to Claim 2 of U.S. Patent 5,988,598</b></p>	<p><b>Support in Application Serial No. 09/074,496</b></p>
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<p>The post of Claim 37 wherein said first fastener further comprises: a first connector having a first failure strength,</p> <p>and a second connector having a second failure strength,</p> <p>said first failure strength greater than said second failure strength such that upon an impact force being applied along said weak impact axis, said second connector fails and said upper post rotates about said first connector.</p>	<p>The first (upper) end of bracket 152 is connected to upper post member by a first connector including pivot pin 154. Figs. 4-6, specification page 20, lines 3-21.</p> <p>The first connector also includes a shear pin 156. Figs. 4-6, specification page 20, lines 3-21.</p> <p>The pivot pin 154 has a failure strength greater than that of the shear pin 156. Upon impact along a weak axis of the post, the shear pin 156 fails and the upper portion 142 rotates about pivot pin 154. Specification page 21, lines 5-14.</p>
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VII. Conclusion

Applicant has presented claims that correspond exactly to claims of the '598 patent and has identified other pending claims which correspond substantially thereto. Applicant is entitled to an earlier filing date for these claims as the invention of the Proposed Count is disclosed in both the present application filed on May 7, 1998 (almost six months prior to the filing date of the '598 patent) and in U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/046,015, which was filed on May 7, 1997, (nearly 18 months prior to the filing date of the '598 patent) and from which priority is claimed in the present application.

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully requests that an interference be declared between the above-identified application and the '598 patent.

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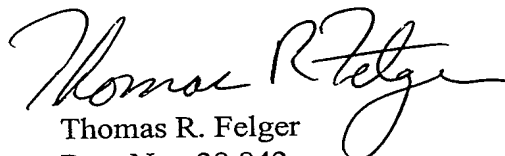
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A check is enclosed in the amount of \$96.00 for the fee due for new Claims 37 and 38. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees (including any extension fees) or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-0384 of Baker Botts L.L.P.

If there are matters which can be discussed by telephone to further the prosecution of this application, Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner call their attorney at the number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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